

R 201004Z SEP 86  
FM AMCONSUL ALEXANDRIA  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6131  
INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ALEXANDRIA 01048

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT)

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: THE "AL-AHRAR" PARTY IN ALEXANDRIA: THE ISLAMIC RIGHT RESURGENT

11. CONFIDENTIAL -- ENTIRE TEXT.

12. SUMMARY AND COMMENT: ONE OF THE MORE INTERESTING PHENOMENA WITHIN EGYPT'S ESTABLISHED OPPOSITION PARTIES OVER THE PAST SIX MONTHS HAS BEEN THE TRANSFORMATION WITHIN THE "LIBERALS" OR "AL-AHRAR" PARTY. THROUGHOUT THE 1970'S AND EARLY 1980'S, THE PARTY WAS PROBABLY THE MOST BOURGEOIS AND PRO-WESTERN OF THE LEGAL OPPOSITION PARTIES (IT INITIALLY EVEN SUPPORTED CAMP DAVID, SUPPORT FOR WHICH HAS SINCE BEEN ABROGATED). THE PARTY'S WEEKLY NEWSPAPER WAS WIDELY READ IN ALEXANDRIA, ESPECIALLY PRIOR TO THE RE-PUBLICATION OF "AL-WAFD" NEWSPAPER WHICH NOW WINS LOCAL POPULARITY CONTESTS. HOWEVER, SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THIS YEAR, THE PARTY HAS BEEN INCREASINGLY RADICALIZED BY A GROUP OF ISLAMIC ACTIVISTS WHO ARE EXPANDING THEIR DOMINANCE OF THE PARTY STRUCTURE. THE POST HAS RECENTLY ESTABLISHED CONTACT WITH A MEMBER OF "AL-AHRAR'S" POLITBURO WHO OPPOSES THE INCREASED ISLAMICIZATION AND WHO HAS DESCRIBED FOR US SOME OF THE RECENT CHANGES IN THE PARTY. THIS SOURCE CONTINUES TO BELIEVE THAT RELIGION FOR MANY OF EGYPT'S YOUNG PEOPLE IS ONLY A FAD, BUT SHE STILL COULD NOT CONCEAL HER CONCERN OVER WHAT HAS OCCURRED WITHIN THE "AL-AHRAR" PARTY. IT IS FAR TOO EARLY TO DETERMINE WHETHER THESE CHANGES WILL ALTER SIGNIFICANTLY THE MINUTE STANDING THE "AL-AHRAR" PARTY HAS ON EGYPT'S POLITICAL MAP, ALTHOUGH ITS IMPACT HAS BEEN FELT IN ALEXANDRIA. AT A MINIMUM, THE INFUSION OF DYNAMIC, YOUNGER BLOOD INTO AN ORGANIZATION WHICH HAD ALMOST CEASED TO EXIST POLITICALLY IS CERTAIN TO INVIGORATE THE LOCAL POLITICAL PROCESS IN FUTURE POPULAR COUNCIL ELECTIONS AND TO GIVE THE SQUABBLING AND DIVIDED LOCAL NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY SOMETHING ELSE TO THINK ABOUT. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

13. TRADITIONALLY, THE "AL-AHRAR" PARTY (OR "THE LIBERALS") HAS ENJOYED ONLY A SMALL FOLLOWING IN ALEXANDRIA. ITS MODERATELY LEFTIST, PRO-WESTERN POLICIES HAD CONSIDERABLE APPEAL TO BUSINESSMEN, SMALL MERCHANTS, AND THE MIDDLE CLASS GENERALLY, BUT THESE SAME ELEMENTS TENDED TO SUPPORT EITHER THE RULING NDP OR THE "WAFD".

14. THE POST'S ATTENTION TO RECENT CHANGES WITHIN "AL-AHRAR" DEVELOPED FOLLOWING THE ANNOUNCEMENT THAT SHAYKH SALAH ABU ISMAIL WAS PLANNING TO ADDRESS THE PARTY FAITHFUL IN ALEXANDRIA ON SEPTEMBER 11, A DATE WHICH COINCIDED WITH THE PERES-MUBARAK SUMMIT. FOR SEVERAL YEARS, ABU ISMAIL HAS BEEN ONE OF THE MORE ARTICULATE (AND RADICAL) PROPONENTS OF THE ISLAMIC TENDENCY IN EGYPT. ALTHOUGH HE HAS CONTINUALLY ESCHEWED VIOLENCE, HE HAS PROMOTED A VERY STRINGENT PROGRAM REGARDING ADOPTION OF THE "SHARIA" (ISLAMIC LAW) AND OTHER MEASURES DESIGNED TO MAKE EGYPT INTO SOME KIND OF ILL-DEFINED ISLAMIC STATE. EARLIER THIS YEAR, ABU ISMAIL AND A LARGE NUMBER OF FOLLOWERS JOINED THE "AL-AHRAR" PARTY. ABU ISMAIL IS, IN EFFECT, THE DRIVING FORCE IN THE PARTY BEHIND THE CHAIRMAN, MUSTAFA KAMAL MURAD.

15. CONGEN PERSONNEL RECENTLY CONTACTED MRS. RAGAA RASHAD, AN ALEXANDRIAN LAWYER AND MEMBER OF THE PARTY'S POLITBURO (SHE ALSO HEADS THE LIBERALS "WOMEN'S AFFAIRS" DEPARTMENT). RASHAD (PLEASE PROTECT) IS A STRONG OPPONENT OF THE RECENT CHANGES IN THE PARTY. IN A RECENT CONVERSATION,

SHE TALKED ABOUT ABU ISMAIL'S SEPTEMBER 11 CONVOCAION OF THE ALEXANDRIA BRANCH OF THE PARTY AND DESCRIBED THE IMPACT OF THE ISLAMIC RIGHT'S INROADS.

16. CONCERNING THE FORMER, RASHAD DECLINED TO GIVE TOO MANY DETAILS. SHE NOTED THAT ABU ISMAIL HAD HIGHLIGHTED FOUR POINTS: (A) THE OPPOSITION BOYCOTT OF THE SHURA COUNCIL ELECTIONS THIS FALL; (B) THE IMPORTANCE OF THE APPLICATION OF THE "SHARIA"; (C) CONDEMNATION OF THE TORTURE OF "ISLAMIC GAMAAT" MEMBERS IN PRISON (NOTE: THIS IS A CONSTANT THEME IN THE OPPOSITION PRESS, AND ESPECIALLY IN "AL-WAFD", AS READERS OF THE CAIRO PRESS REVIEW WILL NOTE.); AND (D) "AL-AHRAR'S" OPPOSITION TO THE EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI SUMMIT.

17. ON THE RECENT CHANGES WITHIN THE "AL-AHRAR" PARTY, RASHAD ARGUED THAT MANY OF THE PARTY'S KEY PRINCIPLES HAVE CHANGED SINCE SHAYKH ABU ISMAIL "TOOK OVER." PREVIOUSLY, THE PARTY BELIEVED THAT THE "SHARIA" WAS ONE OF THE SOURCES FOR LEGISLATION. NOW, THE PARTY HAS DETERMINED THAT "SHARIA" IS THE SOLE SOURCE OF LEGISLATION. EVEN THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PARTY, MUSTAFA KAMAL MURAD, HAS SEEMED TO CHANGE. RASHAD SAID THIS OCCURRED FOLLOWING A VISIT TO SAUDI ARABIA. MURAD (WHO WAS KNOWN IN ALEXANDRIA FOR HIS NIGHTLY BOUTS WITH JOHNNY WALKER) IS LETTING HIS BEARD GROW AND IS BECOMING VERY RELIGIOUS, ACCORDING TO RASHAD. OTHER SOURCES TELL US HE HAS BECOME VERY MORIBUND IN HIS DIRECTION OF PARTY ACTIVITIES AND SEEMS TO HAVE ABDICATED MUCH OF HIS AUTHORITY TO ABU ISMAIL AND HIS SUPPORTERS.

18. AS FOR THE NEW PARTY MEMBERS, MRS. RASHAD SAYS THAT THE PARTY NOW SEEMS TO CONSIST OF VARIOUS SECTS OF MUSLIM GROUPS. EACH GROUP, SHE ADDED, HAS A DIFFERENT NAME, SUCH AS "THE REJECTION OF THE FORBIDDEN AND THE REQUESTING OF FAIRNESS ASSOCIATION." SHE CHARACTERIZED MOST OF THEM AS "RADICALS". MOST OF THE MEMBERS, SHE SAID, ARE WELL-EDUCATED. MANY ARE PROFESSIONALS SUCH AS DOCTORS, LAWYERS, AND PHARMACISTS. MOST OF THE WOMEN ARE TOTALLY COVERED. EVEN THOSE WHO ARE EDUCATED (AND MOST OF THEM ARE, ACCORDING TO THIS SOURCE) SEEM TO BELIEVE THAT WOMEN SHOULD BE COVERED SO AS NOT TO ATTRACT MEN AND THEREBY "COMMIT A SIN." EXPANDING ON THIS LOGIC, SHE SAID THAT PROPONENTS OF THIS POLICY BELIEVE THAT IF THE WOMAN HAS PRETTY HANDS, THEN THE HANDS HAVE TO BE COVERED. ATTRACTIVE EYES ALSO HAVE TO BE COVERED, EITHER BY WEARING GLASSES OR A VEIL. EVEN PHOTOGRAPHS OF PEOPLE WHICH USED TO DECORATE PARTY OFFICES HAVE BEEN REMOVED BECAUSE THEY ARE CONSIDERED TABOO, ACCORDING TO RASHAD. IN A RELATED INCIDENT, SHE REPORTED THAT ABU ISMAIL'S DEPUTY, SHAYKH YUSIF AL-BADRI (AKA YOUSSEF EL BADRY) WAS ONCE INFURIATED BECAUSE "AL-AHRAR" NEWSPAPER HAD PICTURED "NAKED WOMEN" ON ONE OF ITS PAGES. MRS. RASHAD DISCOVERED LATER THAT BY NAKED WOMEN, HE MEANT WOMEN WHOSE HAIR WAS NOT COVERED. MRS. RASHAD HAS, HERSELF, COME UNDER PRESSURE TO WEAR THE VEIL, BUT SHE HAS THUS FAR SUCCESSFULLY RESISTED.

19. ASKED FOR HER VIEWS ON THE CURRENT APPEAL OF ISLAM TO EGYPT'S YOUNG PEOPLE, RASHAD RECITED REASONS MENTIONED BY MANY IN THE COUNTRY'S SECULAR POLITICAL ESTABLISHMENT. POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PRESSURES ARE CHIEFLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE RELIGIOUS REVIVAL, SHE SAID. NEVERTHELESS, SHE QUESTIONED WHETHER THE ALL OF THE YOUNG MEN WHO WEAR BEARDS AND CLAIM TO BE RELIGIOUS ARE AS DEEPLY COMMITTED AS THEY STATE. SHE RECALLED THE STORY OF A RELATIVE WHO WAS A MEMBER OF ONE OF THE "SUNNI" (IN THIS CONTEXT, "SUNNI" MEANS RELIGIOUSLY DEVOUT BEARDED PEOPLE) GROUPS. HE FELL IN LOVE WITH A GIRL WHO WAS NOT VEILED AND EVENTUALLY LEFT THE GROUP, SHAVED HIS BEARD, AND ADOPTED A DECIDEDLY SECULAR LIFE STYLE.

110. BIO NOTE: RAGAA RASHAD HAS LONG BEEN ACTIVE IN HUMAN RIGHTS AND WOMEN'S AFFAIRS. IN THE LATTER CONTEXT, SHE HAS ADVOCATED THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A COMMITTEE IN ALEXANDRIA TO DEFEND WOMEN'S RIGHTS. SHE HAS PARTICIPATED

IN A NUMBER OF HUMAN RIGHTS CONFERENCES ABROAD AND, LOCALLY, HAS LECTURED TO THE MUSLIM YOUTH ASSOCIATION ABOUT CITIZENS' RIGHTS. A POLITICAL MODERATE, SHE IS A LAWYER AND CURRENTLY IN CHARGE OF LEGAL AFFAIRS IN ALEXANDRIA'S GUMRUK DISTRICT. TWO LOCAL ISSUES OF CURRENT INTEREST TO HER ARE SOLUTION OF THE CITY'S ENORMOUS SEWERAGE PROBLEM THROUGH COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF DAY CARE NURSERIES TO HELP WORKING WOMEN PLACE THEIR CHILDREN DURING THE DAY.

HAMBLEY